

UNDER A CLOUD.

Morris Tucker and his uncle sat at their cozy breakfast table one winter morning, each with a copy of the morning paper in his hand, each with a clouded brow and troubled eye. The elder gentleman was the first to speak.

"It is a bad business, Morris."

"A bad business, indeed, sir?"

"Then there was another long silence, while each again read the ominous news of the failure of a firm whose business was so involved with their own that the failure of one house was nearly ruin to the other. The hot chops cooled on the dish, the coffee was untouched and the breakfast literally forgotten, when the gentlemen left the house to ascertain the extent of their misfortune. And as they feared these would prove, the realities were even worse than the anticipation, and before long the old firm of Tucker & Co. was on the list of failures."

There was a dreary amount of hard, distasteful work to be done after the failure was an established fact; but Morris Tucker never flinched from any task or interview till night shadows fell, and he faced his uncle at the table once more. Then, with set features and a pale face, he said:

"If you can spare me for an hour, sir, I think I had better call on Miss Cresswell."

"I can spare you, but are you wise to hurry an interview that, I fear, will be very painful?"

"Better to understand my position at once, sir. If I have heard from Mrs. Cresswell, as if the words checked him—"My life is true to me, I will remain here and try to work my way up again to the position I held only yesterday. If she frees me from my engagement, I accept your proposal to go to California."

"I think it is a good time to look up those old claims," said Mr. Tucker, sliding easily over the first part of his nephew's speech; "there may be money in them."

"We will see! If I do not go, we may be able to find some trustworthy messenger."

"I am afraid you will go," his uncle said.

"It may be, Mrs. Cresswell is a worldly woman."

"Meta is a worldly woman! Nay, let me speak, Morris. I have said nothing before, though my heart was sore over your choice of a wife. Meta is a wonderfully fascinating beautiful and accomplished as but few women are, but she is thoroughly heartless. I hated your choice would fail on Clara."

"Clara! She is a mere child!"

"Only two years younger than Meta. I love her very dearly, Morris."

"But you are fond of Meta."

"No! For her father's sake, the brother of my dead wife, I have tried to love Meta, but she repels me."

"Yet you never spoke when I told you I should seek to win her love?"

"Because love is too sacred in my eyes for any one to interfere with its expression. If Meta loves you, I will never speak of any other woman and cordial affection when she becomes your wife, Morris. But nerve yourself for the worst, my boy!"

Nerved for the worst, Morris Tucker sought his betrothed bride. From the time he had come from his Western home, an orphaned lad of nineteen, to accept his uncle's offer of a home, he had met Meta Cresswell constantly. He had received cordial welcome from her mother, and had not suspected the schemes and subtle influence that had led him, step by step, from the position of friend to that of accepted suitor of the beautiful girl. While his feet were bringing him slowly to the momentous interview after the failure of the firm of which his uncle had made him full partner, Mrs. Cresswell was the emergency.

"Did you write to Morris, Meta?" she asked, languidly stirring her coffee.

"Not yet," was the reply. "He will probably call, being an honorable gentleman, Morris."

"I hope you will be firm, Meta. Remember that you have been the injured party throughout. From the time your poor papa died I have had every reason to believe Mr. Tucker would make you and your sister the heiress of his property. He worshipped your aunt, and he never spoke of any other girl of his own till this nephew appeared. I believe there was some quarrel between the brothers that ended in the younger one going West, while John, the elder, remained here. At all events, it is very clear now that Morris would never have been in business and property if this failure had not happened. You are to be congratulated that it came before the wedding instead of after."

Meta shrugged her shoulders.

"Yes! Love in a cottage is not in my style. And while the love of Morris is a thing and she knew her lover was waiting to test her cold, worldly heart. She sauntered with easy grace into the drawing-room, while up stairs in her own room her sister Clara wept for the pain that was to fall upon Morris Tucker's heart."

She was a brown-eyed, golden-haired girl, whose quiet, unpretending charms had long been overshadowed by the more brilliant beauty of her sister Meta. She was timid to a fault, and was her mother's greatest affliction in her career of fashion and gaiety. With a higher intellect than Meta's, with more command of foreign tongues, with a true musician's love and knowledge of music, a sweet clear voice, and powerful powers of expression, she was so painfully shy, that society was a misery to her. Her beauty was of the delicate order that does not strike at first glance, and her affections were carefully hidden in her shrinking, gentle heart.

She had given John Tucker true love since she was a mere baby and sat upon his knee, playing with his watery hand some clay, and overthought of his money, and when Morris came she was only glad that her dear old uncle, as she called him, was to have a companion and friend. She had never questioned her heart about Morris Tucker, receiving sincerely when his engagement with Meta drew him into nearer brotherly relations with herself. She respected his worth, his devotion to his uncle; she admired his talents, his noble, frank beauty, and she grieved deeply over the sorrow so suddenly thrown into his life. Slightly as she had liked him, she crept away to weep for him. The heartlessness that would throw him aside in his trouble was only comprehensible to her from knowing well how her mother and sister worshipped wealth.

She heard the door of the drawing-room open and her sister's clear voice say coldly:

"Good evening, Mr. Tucker. You have my best wishes for your future success."

Then a voice as cold and haughty answered:

"Thank you. I have the honor to wish you good evening."

The drawing-room door closed, and Clara could see Morris standing under the hall lamp, silent and evidently wishing to recover somewhat from the pain of the trying interview before going into the street. He was very pale, and the brightness that had formed one of the greatest attractions of his face was all stricken from it. The sad, pallid face conquered all Clara's shyness. With a sudden, irresistible impulse she glided down the stairs and stood beside Morris. He did not hear the light footfall upon the thick carpet, nor see that he was not alone until a soft touch on his arm startled him. Looking down, he saw a sweet, gleaming face, soft brown eyes, misty with unshed

tears, raised to his own, while Clara said in a low voice:

"Morris, I must tell you how sorry I feel for you and Uncle John."

"Thank you," he said, gravely, covering the little white hand upon his arm with his own; "I will tell my uncle what you say."

"But he will not believe me," said Clara, "that he has no friend who loves him more truly than I do—no one who feels more deeply any misfortune that can happen to him."

"I will carry your message. And will you wish me God speed, too, Clara? I shall sail for California in a few days."

The large, brown eyes dilated, while the sweet face grew white as snow. The color was so sudden. Without word or murmur Clara fell forward, fainting. Morris caught her in his arms and carried her to the library. It was dark there, and no one saw the bliss he reaped upon the pale lips before he put Clara gently upon the sofa and left her. He did not linger again in the hall. Snatching his coat and hat hurriedly from the rack, he strode into the street and walked rapidly homeward.

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"I thought you were very anxious to be mother-in-law to his \$200,000?"

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A SAILOR'S YARN.

A Story of Early Days in San Francisco. (San Francisco Call.)

"Beg pardon, Mister, but didn't there used to be a gin mill somewhere hereabouts?"

The place was in front of a substantial building on Market street. The speaker was evidently a sailor rigged out for a lark ashore, and the person addressed was a journalist.

The latter replied, after a glance at the weather beaten tar: "There undoubtedly was a gin mill here at some time, for in the early days such places were as thick as huckleberries in this part of the city. You'll have no trouble in finding a gin mill now, if that's all you want. Are you anxious to find the particular one referred to?"

"Well, yes, sir, although it don't matter much. Fact is, I was got away within that place once, and I thought I'd just like to take a walk for old times with the man who ran the gin mill when I last here. Why, ye never see such a bloomin' fool as I was in them days."

"If you had a rough time of it in that gin mill what is your present idea in trying to find the place where you want to raise a row with the barkeeper?"

"Oh, no, sir; not by any means. Why, Lord bless your soul, I don't bear no grudge against the place; and it wasn't there I got crimped—else I'd tell you about it, if I'd care to know how they shipped crews on American craft in them times."

"All right; but come into this cigar store, where the people won't run over us. What sort of a cigar will you smoke?"

"Thank ye kindly, sir